Article

Standards and Specifics – the Layout of Arabic Didactic Poems in Manuscripts*

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1. Introduction

Arabic manuscripts are enormously diverse in terms of their layout. Although a number of layout features have already been explored, the research conducted up to now can generally be characterised by its incompleteness and imbalance since high-quality manuscripts – especially early copies of the Qurʾān – have been the object of palaeographical, codicological and art-history research more frequently than plain manuscripts have.

A systematic investigation and description of the layout of a relatively large number of plain manuscripts of a particular type has not been carried out yet. Thus, there is still a need for further research. One minor area of research will be explored here involving copies of didactic poems written in Arabic.

From the ninth to at least the nineteenth century, didactic poetry in the Islamic world was written on a wide range of topics:[1] dogmatics, Qur'ānic sciences, jurisprudence, history and logic were expounded as well as algebra, medicine, agriculture and even the interpretation of dreams, just to name a few.[2] Despite varying so much in terms of their subjects, didactic poems have at least two things in common, namely that they are rhymed and composed in metric language. But even if the form of writing they contain equates to poetry, didactic poems are not usually considered to be poetry in a proper sense.[3] The primary purpose of these poems was the preservation and didactic transmission of knowledge. The former was primarily achieved by metre and rhyme, by which the text of a single verse was protected. Even if the number of lines differed because of additional or omitted lines, the content of the verse was fixed. Regarding the process of knowledge transmission, written and oral transmission complement each other.[4] In fact, it was not unusual for didactic poems to be memorised entirely since rhyming facilitates memorisation. In addition to the factors already mentioned, the process of knowledge transmission is also promoted by the length of text since didactic poems generally do not contain any more than 150 lines (with a few exceptions).[5] This also applies to the didactic poem which is to be examined here: the *Badʾ al-amālī* ('Beginning of Dictations') written by ʿAlī ibn ʿUṯmān al-Ūshī (d. after 1173).

Al-Ūshī was a scholar who stood in the Ḥanafī tradition, one of the four Sunnī schools of law named after the scholar Abū Ḥanīfa (d. 767). He lived in al-Ūsh (Osh, now in the Kyrgyz Republic), a city located in the eastern part of the Ferghana Valley. Al-Ūshī is famous for his didactic poem *Badʾ al-amālī*, whose title corresponds to the last words of the first hemistich[6] and which is also known by the abbreviated form *al-Amālī*.[7] It is a popular creed in verse form, which presents complex matters concerning the tenets of faith briefly and concisely from a Māturīdī point of view, one of the two principal schools of Sunnī theology.[8] It comprises the usual topics dealt with in statements of belief, such as the attributes of God, the eternity of these attributes and the eternity of God, the diversity of God and his creation, the uncreatedness of the Qurʾān, the Prophet Muḥammad, the meaning and status of the Rightly Guided Caliphs, and Paradise and Hell.[9]

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[1] Cf. Seidensticker 2009, 1.

[2] Cf. van Gelder 1995, 106.

[3] Cf. Seidensticker 2009, 1.

[4] Cf. Schoeler 2006, 65.

[5] Cf. Seidensticker 2009, 1.

[6] Cf. ibid.

[7] Other names by which the poem is known are *al-Qaṣīda al-lāmīya fī t-tauḥīd* and *Qaṣīdat Yaqūlu l-ʿabd*. Cf. Quiring-Zoche 1994, 111.

[8] It seems that the *Badʾ al-amālī* has been influenced by the creeds (*ʿaqāʾid*) of Naǧm ad-Dīn Abū Ḥafṣ an-Nasafī (d. 1142). Since the latter's works have often been copied, commented on and adopted, they have played a significant role in the spread of the Māturīdī doctrine. The same applies to the didactic poem by al-Ūshī, which has often been copied and analysed in commentaries as well. Cf. Madelung 1991, 848.

[9] Cf. von Bohlen 1825, 9–12.

The *Badʾ al-amālī* was often copied and interpreted in commentaries. Hence, there are copies[10] of it in almost every major library containing Arabic manuscripts. Meanwhile, both the original number of lines and the sequence of the verses are known. These findings are due to studies that were part of the sub-project in Arabic and Islamic Studies conducted by the research group called 'Manuscript Cultures in Asia and Africa' at the University of Hamburg.[11] A detailed examination of a large amount of manuscripts revealed that the *Badʾ al-amālī* originally comprised 64 verses.[12] In some exemplars, however, the number of verses differs because of additional or omitted lines[13] and the sequence of verses is subject to considerable variation (hardly any copies display the same order of verses).

In this essay, another aspect will be investigated, namely the layout of copies of this didactic poem. To this end, thirty manuscripts have been analysed that are in the possession of libraries in Berlin, Munich, Göttingen, Princeton and Istanbul, plus one Nigerian manuscript containing the poem. Further manuscripts containing other didactic poems were used to determine whether a specific type of layout is typical of this genre or at least a certain didactic poem, or whether specific layout elements are peculiarities of individual copies. A final comparison with copies of poems of other sub-genres, namely copies of Abū Nuwās' *Dīwān* (a collection of poetry), serves to provide information as to whether the exposed types of layout are specific to didactic poems or whether the layout was generally used for copies of any kind of poetry.

2. Composition of lines

2.a. Pseudo-columns

The page layout, or *mise-en-page*, is the arrangement of various graphic elements on a page. This includes the actual text on it, of course. Even though most Arabic manuscripts were written in blocks of text occupying the central part of the page,[14] there were also many other ways to place a text on a page. Certain arrangements seem to have been preferred for texts of a specific genre, however. A first rough inspection prior to a detailed examination of individual copies has already confirmed one assumption, namely that didactic poems were largely written in two columns, a layout familiar from other types of poetry. As a matter of fact, 22 of the 31 analysed copies of the *Badʾ al-amālī* feature this arrangement, six of them with rule-borders, nine of them with dividers and two of them with both characteristics.[15] However, all of these are pseudo-columns, which means that the column on the right contains the first hemistich and the column on the left the second one. Consequently, in order to read the poem, one always has to read the entire line and not column by column. Usually the two columns are of equal width; only a manuscript from Ilorin (Nigeria) – an unframed copy of the *Badʾ al-amālī* – differs in this respect (fig. 1).

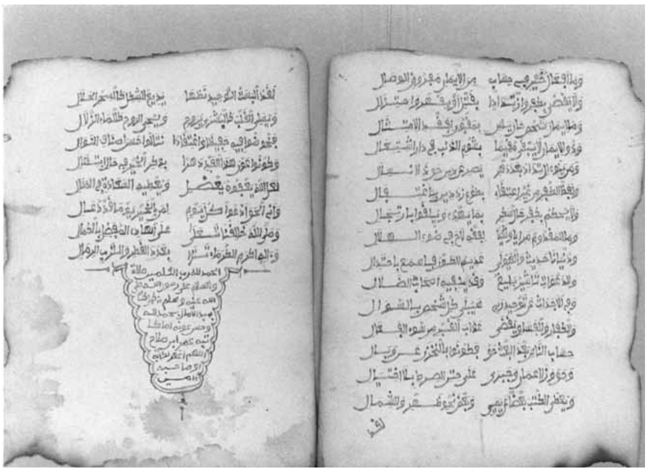


Fig. 1: Manuscript from a private collection owned by the Ile Tapa Gbodofu Qur'ān school in Ilorin, Nigeria.

This manuscript on the scale of 21×16 cm was possibly copied in the nineteenth century since the paper corresponds to that of other manuscripts produced at that time. The scribe, ʿUmar ibn Ṣalāḥ, is named in the colophon. The work is part of a collection belonging to the Ile Tapa Gbodofu Qur'ān school in Ilorin, Nigeria – a Nupe family of weavers and teachers of the Qur'ān who possess a large number of manuscripts, most of which are of an early date. The existence of a manuscript with Māturīdī content in sub-Saharan Africa is highly unusual.[16] Unlike most other investigated manuscripts containing the poem, this copy features a narrow right-hand column on the verso of each folio. This phenomenon which is quite unusual for copies of poetry in general, is difficult to explain. It is possibly due to the fact that ruling was carried out for only one of the two columns. But this is not the only

[10] The author is aware of the scholarly discourse about the term 'copy'. It is usually understood as an imitation or reproduction of an original, i.e. a duplicate. However, the versions in the manuscripts can be considerably different from each other on a textual and visual level. To simplify matters and for lack of an appropriate term, the word 'copy' is used in the following, comprising the various variants and ways of representing a certain text.

[11] The research group 'Manuscript Cultures in Asia and Africa' at the University of Hamburg was financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG) in the years 2008 till 2011.

[12] Madelung claims that the poem has a length of 66 or 68 verses. Cf. Madelung 2000, 916.

[13] Cf. Ahlwardt 1889, 557.

[14] Cf. Gacek 2009, 177, s.v. 'Page layout'.

[15] See list of Manuscripts at the end of the article.

[16] This information was kindly provided by Prof. Dr. Stefan Reichmuth.

manuscript that differs with regard to the visual appearance of the columns. In another one (fig. 2), a copy of the *Badʾ al-amālī* and an Ottoman Turkish translation of this poem were juxtaposed in the form of a synopsis. The poem in Arabic is on the right-hand side and thus precedes the translation.

Both the Arabic and the Ottoman Turkish version were written in two columns. The verses in Arabic are emphasised and at the same time separated by horizontal lines. Moreover,



Fig. 2: Princeton University Library, Garrett no. 5729Y; fol. 193v (detail).

the whole written area is enclosed in a border and even the columns are separated by a vertical line. This copy is of interest not only in terms of columns, but also in terms of its rule-borders, which will be discussed in more detail in section 3b. It is one of the rare cases in which the poem itself was dated, namely to the year 1103 H (1672 CE). This is a specific feature which is worth mentioning as copies of didactic poems which are in general quite short, are usually parts of multiple-text manuscripts and a dated colophon is only included at the end of the manuscript, if at all.

2.b. Indentation, centring and line spacing

In general, of course, there are many more ways of arranging the verses of such a poem. The layout of poetry varies a great deal in this respect. The following example (fig. 3), dated to 1207 H (1793 CE), reveals that the hemistichs are not always arranged in two columns.

In this particular manuscript, the hemistichs were alternately right-justified and left-justified with an overlap of one or two words. Due to the odd number of lines on every page but the first, one page begins with a first hemistich, whereas on the next page a second hemistich is at the top. The first line is always right-justified, regardless of whether the page begins with a first or a second hemistich. This practice leads to a most unusual effect, namely that, apart from the first page of the copy, the rhyming words are on the left-hand margin on the recto.

In another manuscript (fig. 4), the distiches are alternately right-justified and left-justified. The hemistichs are divided

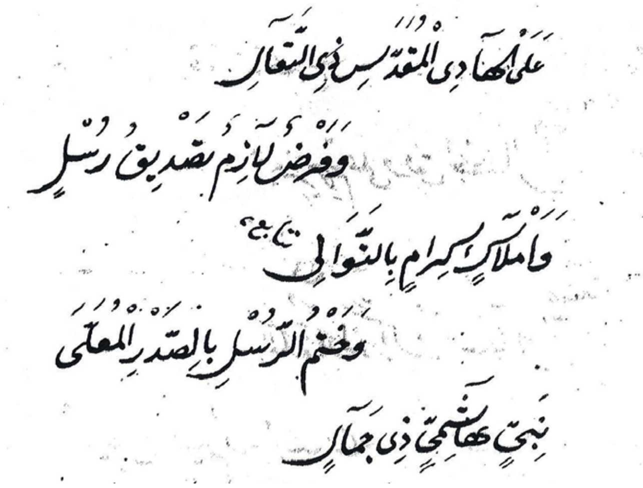


Fig. 3: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Hs. or. 4496; fol. 9v (detail).

by three small circles arranged in the form of a triangle which is upside down. These elements can also be found to the right of the left-justified verses, and vice versa.

Regarding the verse's layout, one of the inspected manuscripts is particularly striking, namely a manuscript kept by the Süleymaniye Library in Istanbul (fig. 5). An annotation on the cover page documents that this manuscript was a donation

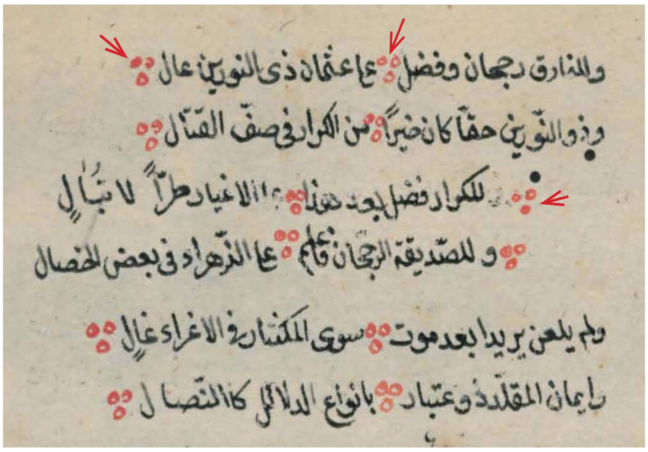


Fig. 4: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Hs. or. 4950; fol. 51v (detail).

(*waqf*) made by the second-to-last Mamlūk sultan, al-Ašraf Qānṣawh al-Ġawrī (often incorrectly vocalised as Qānṣūh al-Ġūrī[17]), who reigned from 1501 to 1516.[18] This manuscript is a more lavish one, written in black and decorated in blue, red and gold ink. Another noteworthy characteristic it has is the framing, which is caused by an uncommon composition of lines.

As a rule, the first hemistich and the first half of the second one are written in one line and the last part of the second hemistich, which carries the rhyme, is centre-justified

[17] Cf. Holt 1978, 552.

[18] Cf. al-Sayyad 2011, 138.

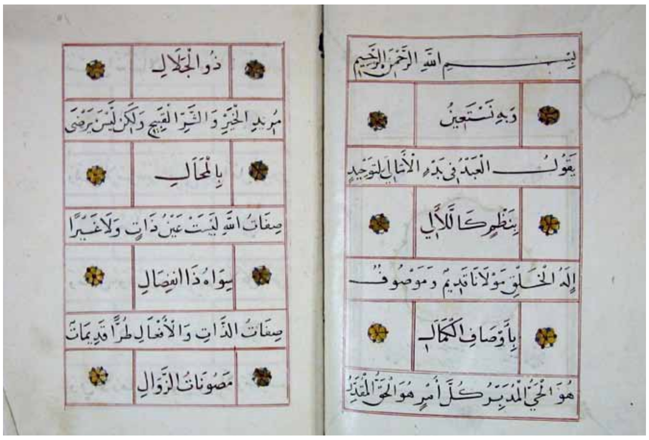


Fig. 5: Süleymaniye Library, Istanbul, Aya Sofya 1446; fols. 50v and 51r.

underneath it. To the right and left of this centred part, separated by a vertical double-line, are six-leaved flowers. The double-lines of which the frame is composed border the lines of the text and the written area. This arrangement is maintained throughout the text. Apart from exceptions such as this, in copies of poetry the line usually ends with the second hemistich and consequently with the rhymed syllable(s). As a result, the verses are separated from each other by the line break. Another manuscript could be identified that shows some particularities in this respect (fig. 6).

Here, the poem was written like a piece of prose, i.e. without any regard for the end of the verses. Instead, the scribe used circular dividers between the hemistichs, the verses and occasionally at the end of the line as well. As a result of this non-uniform arrangement, neither the rhymed parts of the verses nor the dividers are arranged one below the other.

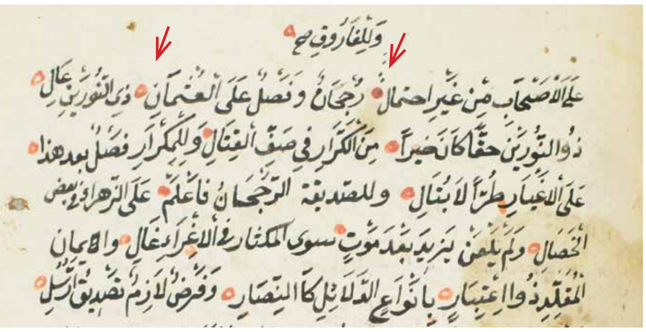


Fig. 6: Niedersächsische Staats und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen, Cod. Ms. arab. 176; fol. 115r (detail).

Another copy (fig. 7) is noteworthy insofar as the hemistichs are neither separated by spacing nor by dividers or rule-borders; only the written area is bordered. However, the copyist obviously strove to end each of the first hemistichs at half the height of the line.

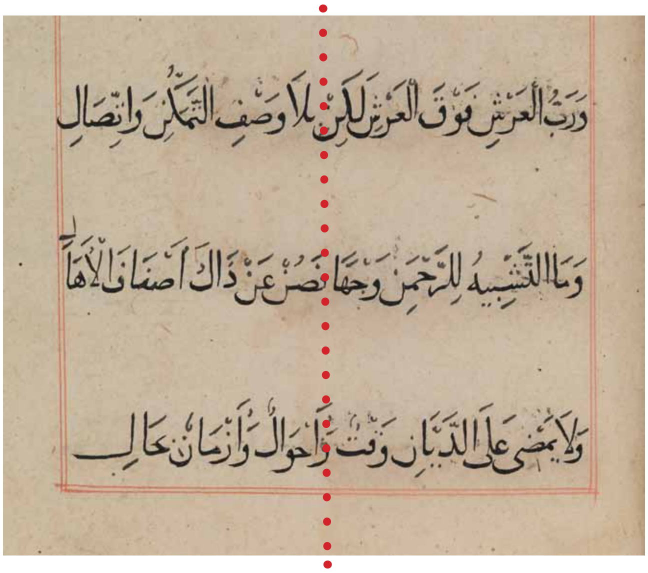


Fig. 7: Princeton University Library, Garrett no. 3563Y; fol. 49r (detail).

A very common practice employed in Arabic manuscripts for copies of all kinds of texts can be seen in this manuscript: scribes altered the shape of letters in order to achieve a uniform line length, no matter whether they appeared in columns or continuous lines. The elongation of the horizontal part of single characters which was known as *kashīda* justification – in this case the rhyme letter *lām* – is a particularly frequent practice used to adjust the length of a line. To avoid excessive length, scribes often contracted words or superscribed the last word or merely a few characters of it. In this manuscript, the scribe avails himself of all three methods. What is noticeable, too, is the broad line spacing, presumably intended for interlinear glosses. All of the copies that were on hand were written in a vertical format, but the relation between the size of the page and the written area varies as well as the number of lines and the interlinear spacing. Considering the cost of material, one reason for a small number of lines might have been an increase in symbolic value. The intention to provide space for glosses may be another reason for wide line spacing and wide margins as well. Numerous manuscripts were destined for textual criticism and consequently prepared for marginal annotations to be made. The example shown here proves that the space between the lines was not always used for this purpose, though.

With regard to interlinear spacing, there is a further interesting manuscript (fig. 8) that has a broad gap of approximately three blank lines between the distiches (framed in red). On some pages, the broad line spacing has been used for interlinear glosses and was probably intended for this.

The line spacing in the other examined manuscripts is considerably smaller; usually they are single-spaced. Nonetheless, even some of the copies with little space between

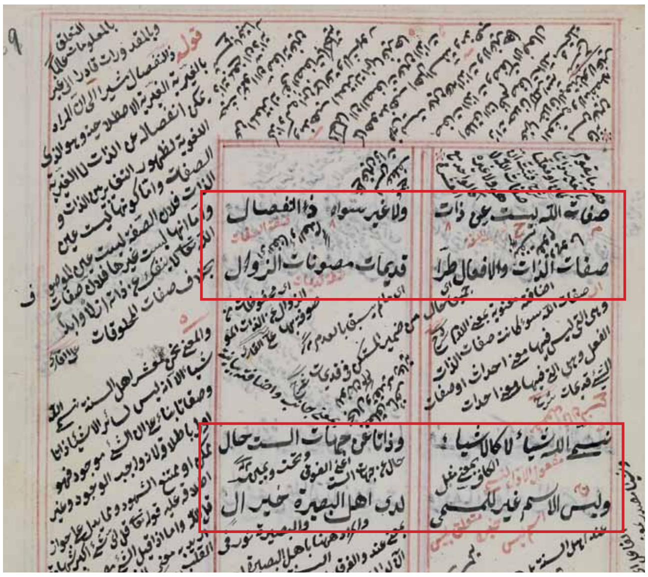


Fig. 8: Princeton University Library, Garrett no. 5310Y; fol. 69r (detail).

the lines contain glosses between them. One of these is particularly noteworthy in this respect (fig. 9).

The text here was written in two columns with only a small amount of space between the lines. In spite of that, there are glosses all over the page, marginal as well as between the lines and the columns. These were written in a horizontal, perpendicular or angular direction and even upside down. The various writing directions have not only been used to distinguish the glosses from the text itself, which is particularly necessary in manuscripts without a bordered text area,[19] but also in order to distinguish the glosses from each other. In addition, markings allocate the glosses to the word or section that has been commented upon, for instance connecting lines or graphic symbols and numbers in pairs.

Besides manuscripts containing only the didactic poem, there are others in which parts of the *Badʾ al-amālī* are embedded in a commentary (e.g. Princeton University Library, Garrett nos. 5807, 5130 and 5310). In this case, the sections commented upon appear within the running text, which is usually justified. Verses that have been commented upon are generally either marked by overlines or written in another colour (red in most cases). The respective verse numbers are frequently stated in the margins, possibly added by a later hand. Sometimes the text of the poem was added separately and in addition in full length at the end of the commentary.

Decorative and organising elements

3.a. Dividers

As was said already above, the most common way to arrange the hemistichs of the didactic poem *Badʾ al-amālī* was to write the text in two columns. However, the space between the columns was not always left blank, but often filled with dividing elements designed in a variety of shapes and colours. In addition, similar elements were sometimes added at the beginning or the end of the verse (the latter is less frequent than the former). The elements used consist, for example, of two or three components arranged in a row or in the form of a triangle. The individual parts may also be connected to each other:

Besides the little drop-shaped or comma-shaped elements shown here, scribes used circular elements to divide the hemistichs, as can be seen in the Göttingen manuscript that has already been mentioned (cf. fig. 6). Similar figures were often used in early codices of the Qurʾān to separate the verses (*āyāt*). The Göttingen manuscript and several other examples indicate that this kind of dividing element was adopted in other types of manuscripts as well, especially those containing

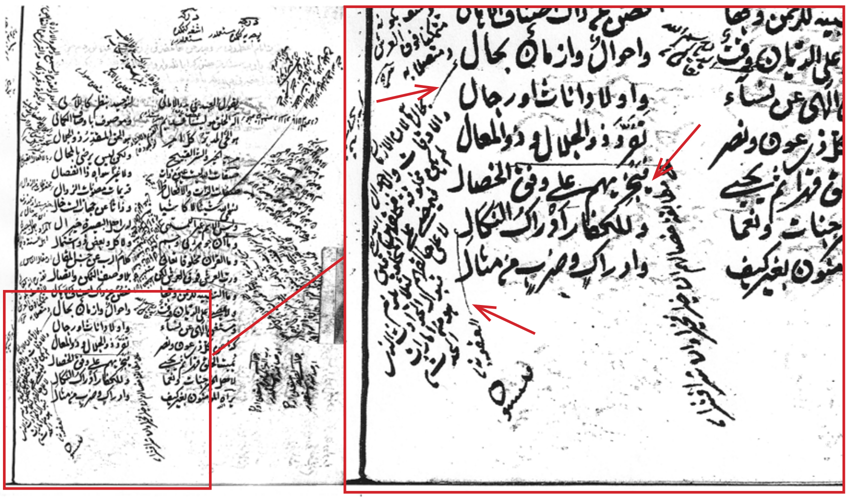


Fig. 9: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Diez oct. 50; fol. 52v.



Fig. 10: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Wetzstein 1754; fol. 149r (detail).



Fig. 11: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Sprenger 1956; fol. 12v (detail).



Fig. 12: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Wetzstein 1718; fol. 77v (detail).

[19] Cf. Gacek 2009, 230, s.v. 'Rule-borders and frames'.

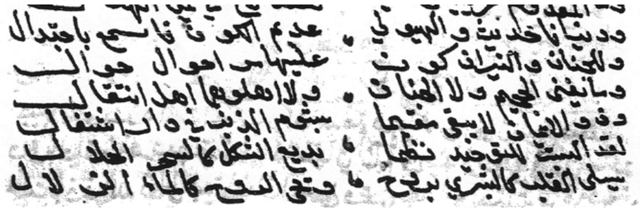


Fig. 13: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Wetzstein 1804; fol. 4r (detail).

poetry.[20] Normally the number of elements corresponds to the number of lines, and the form, colour and arrangement of these elements stay the same throughout the text. However, some exceptions can be found among the manuscripts studied.

In the example shown here (fig. 13), the number of lines and elements to separate the hemistichs deviate from each other, which is why these elements do not separate the single half-lines but as a vertical dotted line the two columns from each other. It is notable that these elements are completely missing on fol. 4v, which indicates that it was produced in two steps. Another indicator is the use of a different colour of ink, namely red, while the text itself is written in black.

In another copy (fig. 14) dated to 1291 H (1874 CE), the form and colour of the dividers vary from page to page, which gives the manuscript a colourful, decorative appearance.

However, all of the dividers consist of drop-shaped elements, sometimes arranged in the form of a triangle or in a row, and one of them sometimes forms the blossom of a stylised flower (fig. 15).

Adolf Grohmann mentions these in connection with figures that ensure the correct reading of the Qur'ān. He introduced the German term 'Differenten' and the Arabic term *muhmala* for these elements. On the basis of the research conducted by J. v. Karabacek, he states that the lower part of this 'flower'



Fig. 14: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Sprenger 1956; fol. 11v (detail).

[20] Cf. Bloom, and Blair 2009, 185.

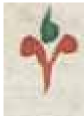


Fig. 15: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Sprenger 1956; fol. 11v (detail).

originally developed from the Qur'ānic abbreviation *lā* as a short form of *lā waqf* (= 'without a break'). As in this manuscript, the angle has often been stylised to form paired leaves or a 'V'.[21] Scribes or illuminators often placed a dot, rhombus, crescent or – as in this case – a drop or inverted comma in the space between the leaves.[22]

In the present manuscript, these flowers do not only serve as dividers; similar elements were also placed above the parallel line of the elongated horizontal stroke of the letter *lām* in order to fill the free space, as shown in fig. 16.

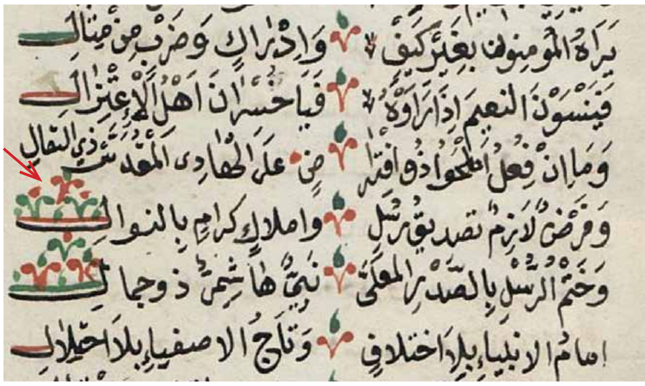


Fig. 16: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Sprenger 1956; fol. 12r (detail).

On the whole, the scribe tried to create columns with a uniform line length. To this end, he occasionally used *kashīda* justification, in this case the *lām* at the end of the line. By lengthening this letter, the line ends with a long horizontal stroke. The last ascender, namely the shaft of the *lām*, is relatively far to the right (cf. fig. 7 and fig. 16). Although the letter was stretched to the edge of the line, this gives the impression that the line is considerably shorter than the others. In order to achieve optical margin alignment, the space above the horizontal stroke was filled with decorations. Additions such as the above-mentioned flowers or zigzag lines (cf. fig. 17) only occur above the longest elongations. shorter ones were merely filled with a parallel horizontal line, which serves the same purpose, however.[23]

[21] Cf. Grohmann 1971, 43.

[22] Cf. ibid., 44ff.

[23] This phenomenon is also known in European typography, where optical margin alignment belongs to the segment of microtypography. It comprises a range of methods which were used to improve the appearance of a justified text. It is required particularly with regard to the long slopes of majuscules. In this context, a concise line arrangement is achieved by manipulation of the characters' width. Majuscules like A, V, W and Y are outdented into the margins in order to align the text border visually. The same is true of the

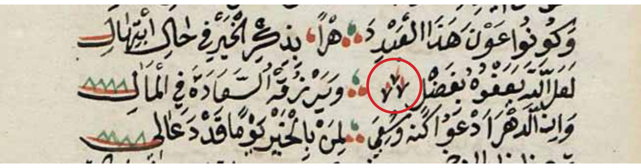


Fig. 17: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Sprenger 1956; fol. 13r (detail).

In general, it is striking that in copies of texts divided into columns, the elongation of single characters mainly appears in the second hemistich, whereas in the first one scribes more often used little graphical elements to fill the gaps and, in doing so, to justify the columns (on the differing length of the first and second hemistich, see below).

In addition to the elongations, the scribe used contractions and superscriptions. In this respect, this copy is another good example of the use of distinct methods to justify the lines.

3.b. Rule-borders and margins

Margins played an important role in page-layout. A margin is the area between the text – sometimes enclosed in rule-borders or a frame – and the edge of the page. While rule-borders (or bounding lines[24]) are present in some of the examined manuscripts, more complex and elaborate frames are not to be found. As is typical for rule-borders, these merely consist of a single thin line or several parallel lines (rules), most often in red ink.[25] A single or two parallel lines can also run vertically between the columns. In both cases, the use of different-coloured ink and interruptions shows that the lines were often only drawn once the copy was finished.

In some copies, different layout elements such as rule-borders and dividers are combined, as can be seen in a manuscript located in Munich (fig. 18).

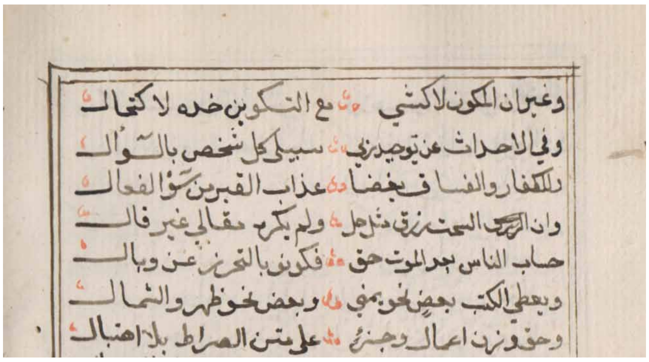


Fig. 18: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Cod. arab. 1735; fol. 94v (detail).

Here, the text is enclosed in rule-borders and the intermediate space between the columns is filled with dividers, consisting of three red drops arranged in the form of a triangle. In addition, a single red drop marks the end of the verse. Generally the use of dividers in addition to rule-borders or frames seems to be rather unusual. This is especially true of dividers placed at the end of a line. Since the end of the verse is already indicated by the rule-border, the rhyme letter and the line break, such dividers can be dispensed with in this case.

Besides enclosing the body of the text, rule-borders were used to separate the text and the marginalia from each other. A further line can be added in order to limit the outward margin and thus avoid marginalia being written too close to the edge and then cut off during the process of (re-)binding.[26] Curiously enough, the manuscript with the Ottoman Turkish translation that was mentioned at the beginning (cf. fig. 2) features an annotation written beyond this outer border (fig. 19).

In this manuscript, marginal notes were apparently intended from the outset. However, in this case, the predefined area has only been used for the introductory invocation 'In the name of God the All-Compassionate, the Most-Merceful' (*basmala*), the catchwords and the foliation.

With most of the examined manuscripts, however, the space was used as intended, which means that the glosses were written in the designated areas. They were usually written in a smaller script and often obliquely, sometimes upside down, in order not to be confused with the body of the text.[27] Quite interestingly, this is often the case, even if the glosses are clearly separated by rule-borders. The skewing of the glosses has other advantages, too. By writing the gloss at an angle, the scribe was able to refer to the annotated word



Fig. 19: Princeton University Library, Garrett no. 5729Y; fol. 193v (detail).

arrangement of special characters and punctuation marks, such as hyphens, which project over the right edge for this purpose. Cf. Neumann 2003, 169a.

[24] Cf. Déroche 2005, 161.

[25] Cf. Gacek 2009, 229, s.v. 'Rule-borders and frames'.

[26] Cf. ibid., 230, s.v. 'Rule-borders and frames'.

[27] Cf. ibid., 115, s.v. 'Glosses and scholia'.

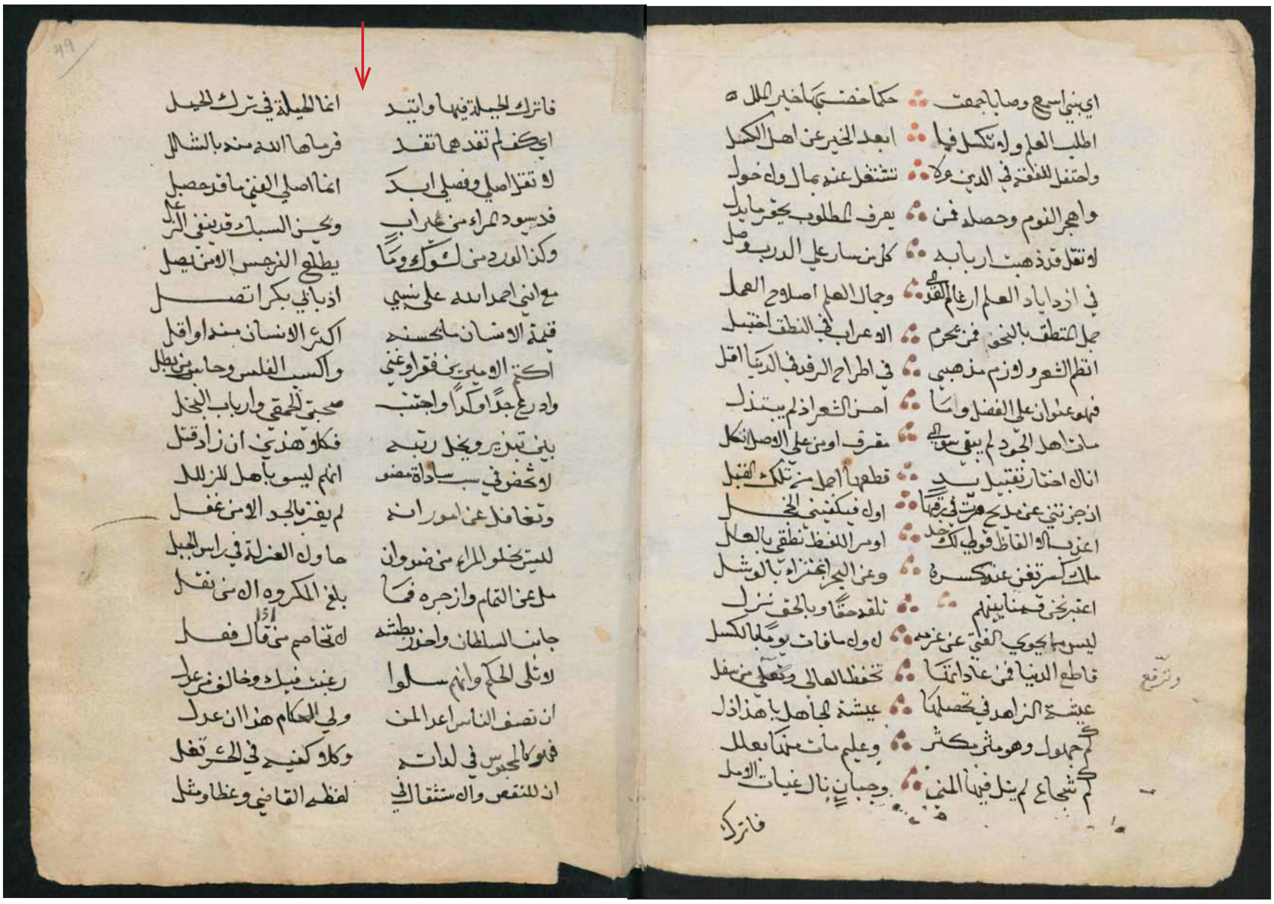


Fig. 20: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Wetzstein 1748; fols. 48v and 49r.

directly by letting one line run directly towards the word he was commenting on. In addition, by making it skewiff, a longer line was available to the writer and thus the small amount of space available could be used more effectively. However, other examples without any space between the lines and in the margins indicate that the corresponding copy was not intended for annotations – neither interlinear nor marginal. But even if the layout clearly indicates that the copy was not meant to be glossed, annotations can often be found.

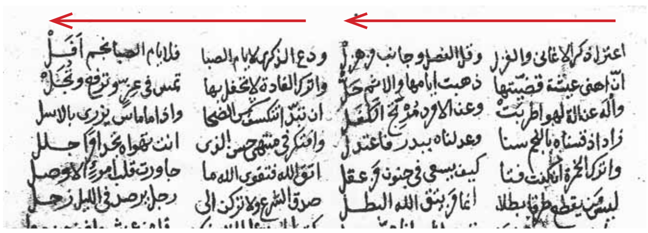


Fig. 21: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Petermann 8; fol. 14 (detail).

4. Comparison with the layout of copies of other didactic poems

Different forms of layout used for copies of the *Badʾ al-amālī* have been examined and described in the first section of this article. Common layout types as well as specifics of individual copies have been outlined. In general, copies of the *Badʾ al-amālī* are characterised by having a highly variable layout, even though there are elements which are obviously standard features. In order to find out if the above-mentioned components and peculiarities of the layout are specific to copies of the *Badʾ al-amālī*, a comparison with copies of other didactic poems will be carried out.

4.a. Ibn al-Wardī's *Qaṣīda al-lāmīya*

First of all, fifteen copies of the *Qaṣīda al-lāmīya*, a poem by Zainaddīn ʿUmar ibn Muẓaffar ibn al-Wardī (d. 1349), were analysed. This poem is also known by the title of *Waṣīya li-waladihī*. As this title indicates, it is addressed to the writer's

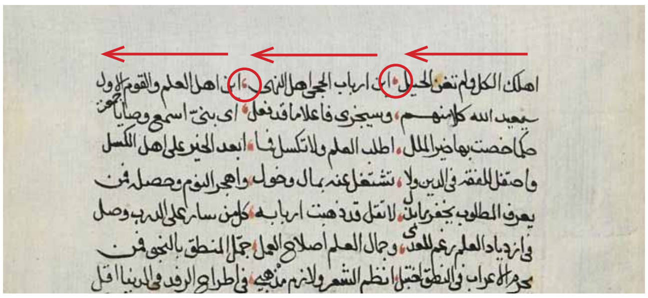


Fig. 22: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Wetzstein 409; fol. 76r (detail).

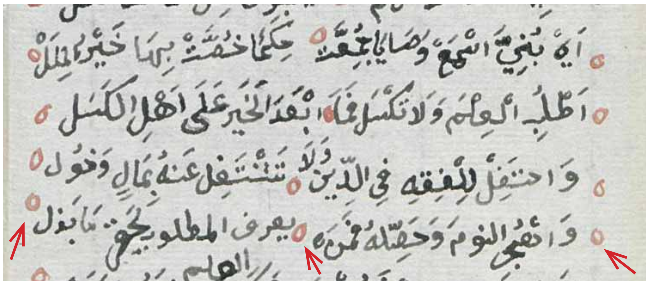


Fig. 23: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Wetzstein 1793; fol. 39v (detail).

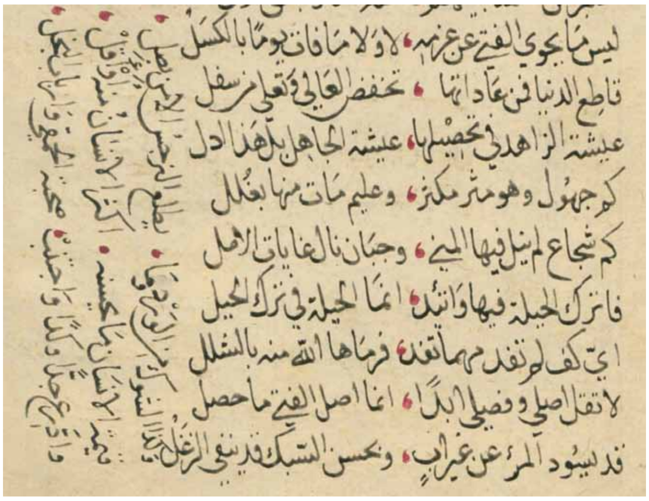


Fig. 24: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Sprenger 1930; fol. 28r (detail).



Fig. 25: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Sprenger 1966; fol. 27v.

son, who is exhorted to live a life that will please God.[28] The number of verses in the manuscripts ranges from 68 to 80. Except for five copies, the hemistichs were arranged in two columns separated by dividers in the majority of cases. However, in one manuscript (fig. 20), the dividers are missing on one of the four pages.

In the other five manuscripts, the arrangement is entirely different in each case. The first one features four pseudo-columns per page (fig. 21). That means two verses or four hemistichs respectively are allocated to four columns.

In another manuscript (fig. 22), the copyist arranged the hemistichs in three columns. This type of composition is very unusual, since only every second line ends with the hemistich with a rhyme. In addition, since the space between the columns is very small, it looks as if the text was written in a block, despite its droplet-shaped dividers.

The same applies to another copy (fig. 23). There are only two columns with a consistent line length on the first page; on the other pages, the hemistichs are of a different length. Due to the circular dividers between the hemistichs, however, which were also placed at the beginning and end of the lines, the hemistichs can still be distinguished from each other quite easily.

Another copy shows two columns divided by little drops in magenta (fig. 24). To the left of these columns and written at a right angle are three (on the last page four) further rows, each with four hemistichs, separated by dividers of the

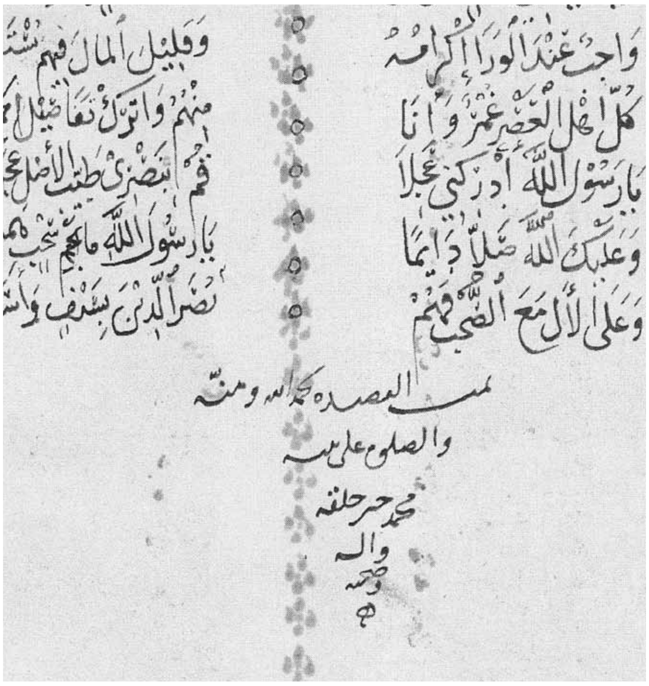


Fig. 26: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Cod. arab. 1235; fol. 109v (detail).

[28] Cf. Quiring-Zoche 1994, 180ff.



Fig. 27: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Petermann 241; fol. 69v.

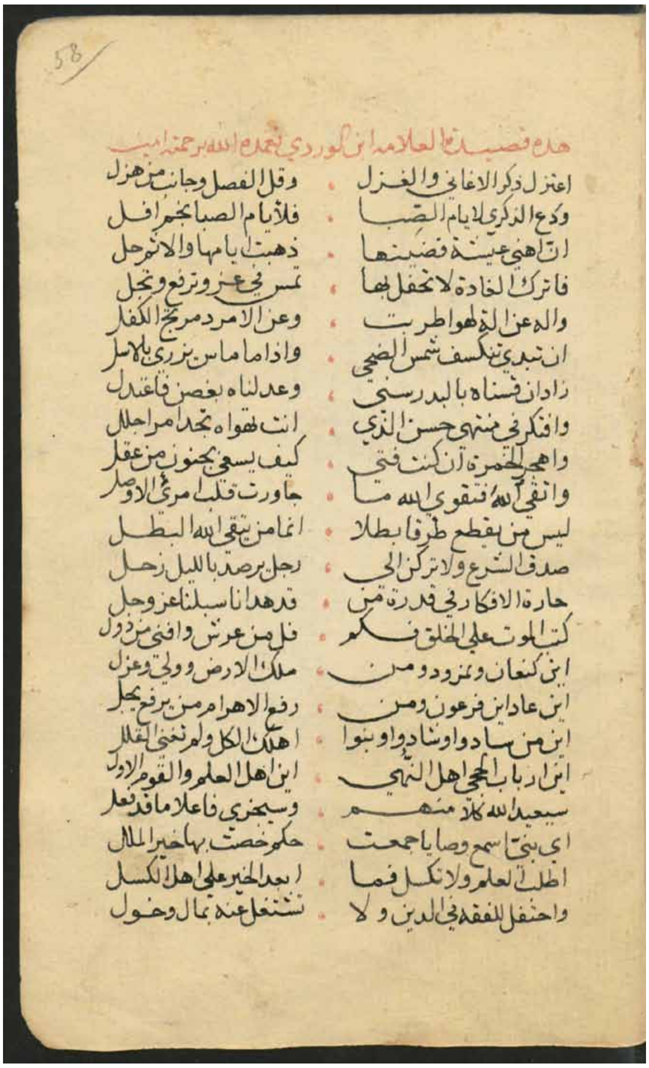


Fig. 28: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Wetzstein 183; fol. 58r.

same type. By knowing the number of lines, the scribe was presumably able to calculate in advance how to finish the poem at the foot of a page.

The peculiarity of the fifth manuscript is that the poem was written in the margin (fig. 25). The lines, each containing one hemistich, were written obliquely to the bordered poem placed in the middle.

Besides the commonly used dividers already introduced in connection with copies of the *Badʾ al-amālī*, yet another type can be detected within this group of manuscripts. It is a kind of expansion of the familiar circular divider to form a flower-like element.

On the last page of this copy (fig. 26), the number of circles corresponds to the number of lines, but the row of petals continues and even runs through the colophon. This leads to the assumption that the petals were drawn first and the circles were added during the process of writing or shortly thereafter. Flowers are already known from the manuscript made for the Mamlūk sultan al-Ašraf Qānṣawh al-Ġawrī (cf. fig. 5), in which they merely have an ornamental function, not a separating one.

In all the examined manuscripts containing this poem, the text was written in black ink. Dividers, elements to adjust the length of a line and headlines were written in red[29] – or magenta in the case of one manuscript (Sprenger 1930; fig. 24). When analysing these copies, it becomes apparent that the text is not surrounded by rule-borders in any of them. This is an unusual and therefore striking fact. The reason for this might be that it was not customary to annotate such a paraenetic poem focusing on moral advice. As a matter of fact, only four of the examined manuscripts show a small number of annotations.

Two copies of the *Qaṣīda al-lāmīya* feature a peculiarity which has already been mentioned in connection with the Ilorin copy of the *Badʾ al-amālī*. In both cases, the text was written in two columns, which often occurs, but one of the

[29] It cannot be said with any certainty for the manuscript Cod. arab. 1235 (see fig. 27), but the petals were probably red originally.

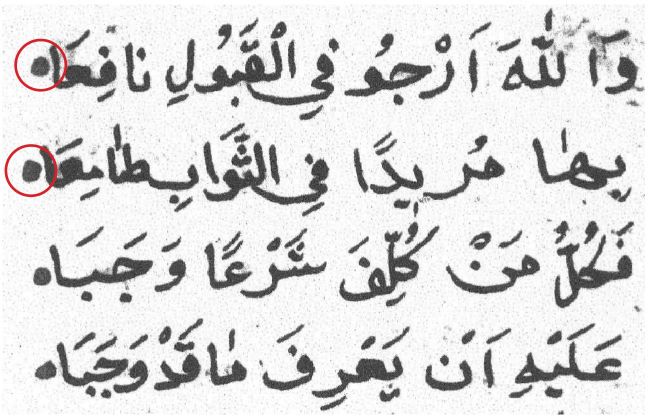

والله أرجو في القبول نافعاه
بها مريدا في الثواب طامعاه
فكل من كلف شرعا وجباه
عليه أن يعرف ما قد وجباه

Fig. 29: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Sprenger 1953; fol. 2r (detail).

two columns is always narrower than the other. In contrast to the Ilorin manuscript, which has a narrow right-hand column on the verso of each folio, these manuscripts display this characteristic on both sides of the page.

In one manuscript (Petermann 241; fig. 27), the narrow column is always on the right. In the other one (Wetzstein 183; fig. 28), however, it is always the left column that is narrower than the adjacent one.

With regard to the width of the single columns of these copies, it is striking that single letters of the wider columns were stretched to a certain length. Obviously the scribes did not aim at giving the columns a uniform width from the outset. On the basis of this discovery, it can be said that two columns of unequal width are not a specific feature of West African manuscripts. Moreover, this phenomenon is evidently not limited to copies of the *Badʾ al-amālī*.

4.b. Al-Laqānī's Ǧawharat at-tauḥīd

In addition, six copies of the *Ǧawharat at-tauḥīd*, a rhymed creed written by Burhān ad-Dīn Abū l-Imdād Ibrāhīm ibn

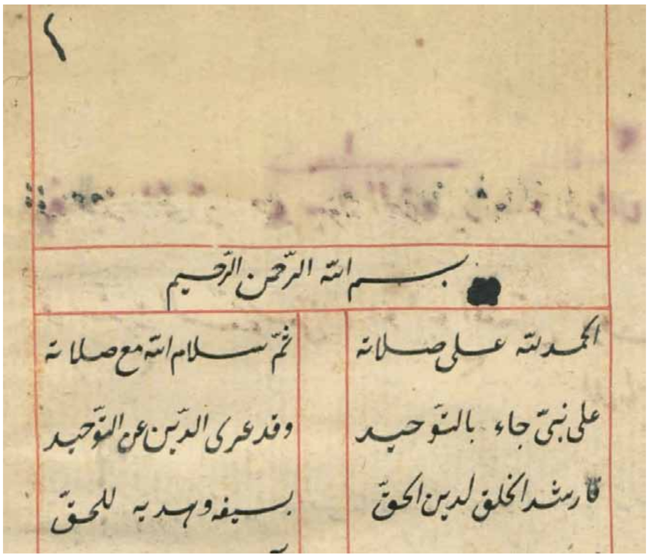

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
الحمد لله على صلاته — ثم سلام الله مع صلاته
على نبي جاء بالتوحيد — وقد عرى الدين عن التوحيد
فأرشد الخلق لدين الحق — بسيفه وهديه للحق

Fig. 30: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Hs. or. 4831; fol. 1v (detail).

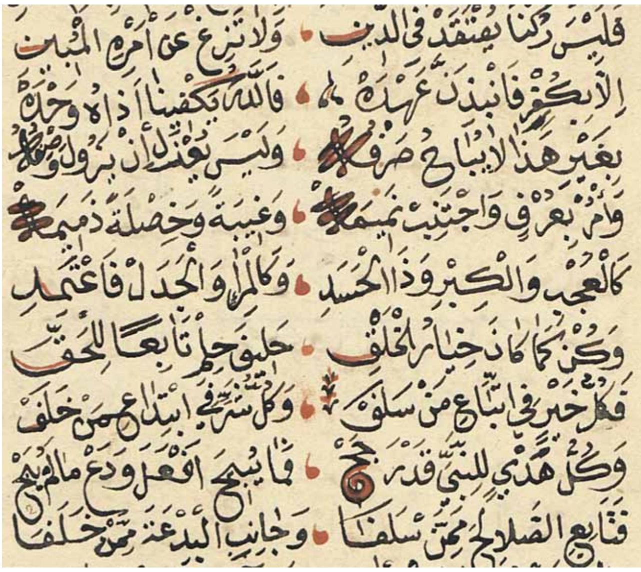


Fig. 31: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Sprenger 1956; fol. 8v (detail).

Ibrāhīm al-Laqānī al-Mālikī (d. 1631), have been chosen for comparison. The number of verses varies in different manuscripts, amounting in most cases to about 114.[30] The layout as a whole – especially the arrangement of verses in two columns – is comparable to the aforementioned groups. An exception to this rule is Sprenger 1953, which shows one hemistich and a circular divider per line apart from the first four lines (fig. 29).

There is only one copy among the examined material that features rule-borders, which are drawn in red with two central lines running parallel to the columns (fig. 30). In addition, two horizontal lines border the preceding *basmala*. Although this is the only exemplar with rule-borders, it is not the only one showing colours other than black. One copy, in particular, stands out with respect to its colouring and decoration (fig. 31).

Several letters are designed very eccentrically. The notation of the letters *hāʾ* und *tāʿ marbūṭa* are noteworthy in this regard as they were written in the form of a lattice. In addition to these grid-shaped letters, the spiral-shaped descenders of the letters *ǧīm*, *ḥāʾ* and *ḫāʾ*, which are usually arc-shaped, are particularly striking. In order to adjust the length of the line, the scribe filled the gaps using congeries of drops or nested V's or he used the *kashīda* justification mentioned above. All of these decorative elements were filled in with red ink or were at least adorned by a parallel red line. This copy of the *Ǧawharat at-tauḥīd* bears an exceeding resemblance to the above-mentioned copy of the *Badʾ al-amālī* (cf. fig.15) regarding the colouring and embellishment of individual letters.

30 Cf. Quiring-Zoche 2000, 96ff.

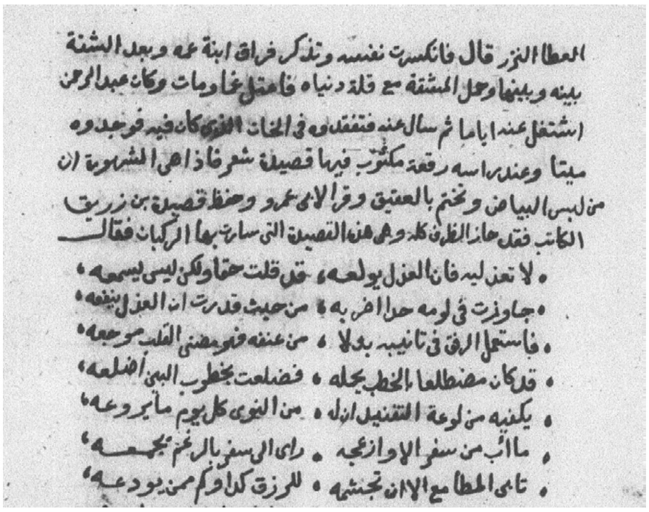


Fig. 32: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Landberg 243; fol. 120r (detail).

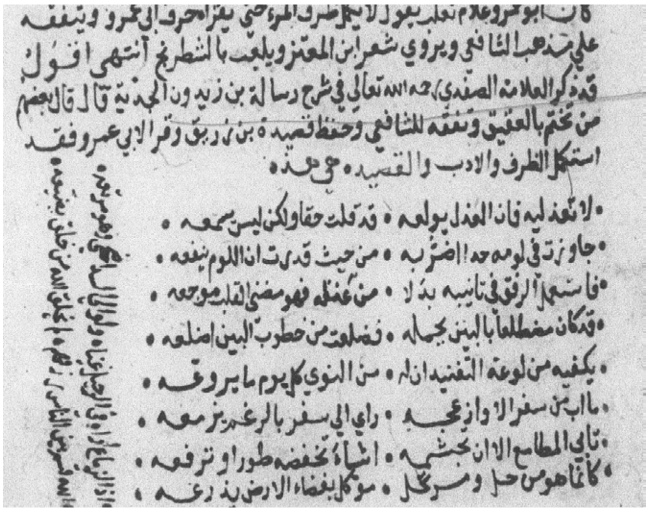


Fig. 33: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Petermann 193,2 ; fol. 53v (detail).

To conclude, one can say that copies of the *Ǧawharat at-tauḥīd* have several similarities to those of the previous groups and that none stands out by having a characteristic that could not be found among the aforementioned manuscripts containing copies of didactic poems.

4.c. Ibn Zurayq's Andalusīya

Of all the copies examined, there is one group whose layout differs in many respects, namely copies of the didactic poem *al-Andalusīya* by Abū l-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Zurayq (d. 1029), a secretary from Baghdad.[31] The number of verses usually amounts to forty, but there are manuscripts with 38 or 39 verses as well. Compared with the didactic poems treated above, it is thus comparatively short.

At first glance, the layout does not seem to differ greatly since copies of the *Andalusīya* were also often written in two columns with a rule-border and dividers placed between the hemistichs. However, the way in which the poem is embedded in the text surrounding it is very different. Unlike the other poems examined, the *Andalusīya* is obviously seldom treated as a separate, independent text; this poem is often passed on together with a prose text, basically a combination of commentary and theological statements, written in a text block. These sections are therefore directly related to the poem, which is probably the reason for the small space between the single text units. In addition, this connection explains the direct change from text block to columns (or another arrangement of the hemistichs), and vice versa.

As can be seen in another example (fig. 32), in some manuscripts the single text units adjoin directly and they are not separated by space or another method used to separate texts such as headings, frames or a different colour.

[31] Cf. Ahlwardt 1894, 585.

As a piece of poetry, the *Andalusīya* stands out from the preceding and subsequent sections as it has a different composition of lines – in this case two columns with dividers. The text block is usually wider than the two columns. However, there is one copy of the *Andalusīya* (Petermann 193,2; fig. 33) in which the poem is continued to the left of the two columns at a right angle, as it was already practised in one copy of the *Badʾ al-amālī* (cf. fig. 25).

Because of this, the poem and the preceding text are nearly of equal width, which possibly was the writer's intention from the outset in order to achieve a harmonious overall appearance.

It is also conceivable that he intended to finish the poem with the end of the page. In the arrangement chosen here, the text takes up the entire recto and ends with the verses that were written at a right angle. If the scribe had only used two columns, he would have ended the poem in the upper part of the following page (verso).

Even though the poem is part of a multiple-text manuscript which only contains poetry (fig. 34; cf. Sprenger 1239 or Ms. or. Quart. 674), the space between the *Andalusīya* and the preceding and subsequent poem is usually very small.

To sum up, regardless of whether the *Andalusīya* is surrounded by prose or poetry, it is apparent that this didactic poem is not usually treated as a separate, independent text. Copies of the *Andalusīya* differ greatly from those of the *Badʾ al-amālī* in this respect. With the exception of two manuscripts (Wetzstein 1754 and Cod. arab. 1735), copies of the *Badʾal-amālī* start at the beginning of a new page and end on a separate one as well. Even if the last verses only take up a third of the page, the remaining space is not usually used for another text. There are only two exceptions among the examined copies of the *Andalusīya*. In one manuscript (Petermann 542; fig. 35), the poem takes up three full pages. This manuscript is bound at the upper edge – a type of binding often used for notebooks

– and the script runs parallel to the binding. The verses of the poem are arranged in two columns with dividers at the beginning and end of each verse and between the hemistichs. These are shaped like a loop with overlapping ends and were drawn in red.

In the other manuscript (Ms. or. Quart. 117; fig. 36), the poem takes up one page written in a block. In this copy, neither dividers nor an extended interspace clearly separate the hemistichs; they are written one after another instead. Nevertheless, the copy shows a certain regularity since every line displays exactly two verses, even though they can hardly be discerned from each other as such.

The phenomenon of four hemistichs per line also appeared in a copy of Ibn al-Wardī's *Qaṣīda al-lāmīya* (cf. fig. 22), but this features four clearly separated pseudo-columns per page. Another one (Petermann 193,1) stands out in terms of the way the hemistichs are arranged.

As in the case of the copy of the *Badʾ al-amālī* in Aya Sofya 1446 (cf. fig. 5), the first and the first half of the second hemistich are written in one line and the last part of the second hemistich, which carries the rhyme, is centre-justified below (fig. 37).

To sum up, the layout of copies of the *Andalusīya* results primarily from the textual context in which it frequently appears and the length of the poem, which is too long for only one page, while two pages are generally too much.



Fig. 35: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Petermann 542; fol. 172v.

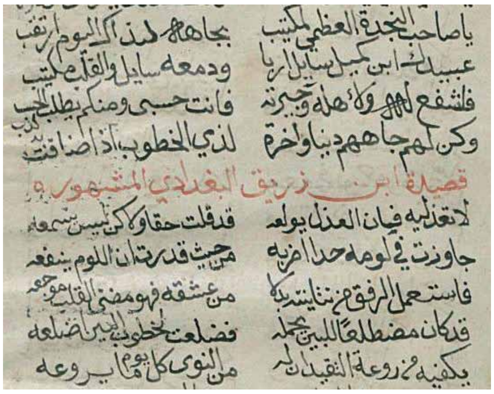


Fig. 34: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Sprenger 1228; fol. 9v (detail).

Comparison with copies of Abū Nuwās' *Dīwān*

A final comparison with copies of poems of other sub-genres serves to provide information as to whether the exposed types of layout are specific to copies of didactic poetry or whether they can generally be found in copies of any kind of poetry. Black-and-white photographs of thirteen copies of Abū Nuwās' *Dīwān*, a bequest from Arthur Schaade (d. 1952) kept by the Hamburg State and University Library, were examined for this purpose.

In the literature of the Near and Middle East, *dīwān* is the Arabic term for a collection of poems by one author that often covers a certain range of topics. These collections are usually quite comprehensive, extending to several volumes. Due to the amount and variety of different poems, not every detail can be described here, but some striking characteristics of the handwriting used for these poems will be pointed out.

Abū Nuwās (d. 815 CE), a famous poet of the early ʿAbbāsid period, is well known for two genres, namely the wine poem and the hunting poem, but he is mainly remembered in connection with the former.[32] His *Dīwān*, which is completely extant, is the earliest to contain a section especially devoted to the chase.[33] His hunting poetry (*ṭardīya*) consists of pieces in both *rağaz* and other metres, but beyond the hunting poems *rağaz* is not to be found.[34] In most copies of his *Dīwān*, these *arāǧīz*, i.e. poems written in *rağaz*,[35] stand out because of their different layout. While poems in other metres in this collection are written in a text block without any intermediate space, the short hemistichs of the *arāǧīz* are split up. With respect to the overall layout of these manuscripts, this means that text blocks of uniform width, merely interrupted by centred or outdented subheadings, form the basic layout used on every page. Only the hunting poems in *rağaz* contrast with this layout as they are written in two columns. It is striking that only one of these eight manuscripts (Köprülü 1250) additionally features dividers between the hemistichs.

In one manuscript (Fātiḥ 3775), only excerpts of his poems were compiled. Only the hemistichs of the verses composed in *rağaz* are split up in this manuscript. Since sections

32 Kennedy 2005, viii.

33 Smith 1990, 168.

34 Cf. ibid., 168 and 174.

35 Kennedy 2005, 110.

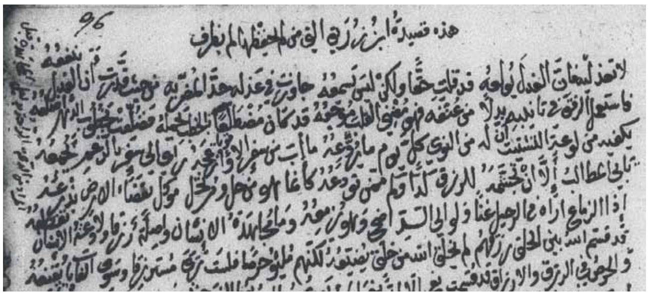


Fig. 36: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Ms. or. Quart. 117; fol. 96r (detail).

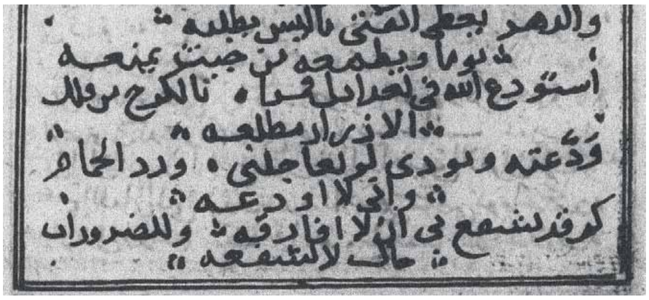


Fig. 37: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Petermann 193,1; fol. 29r (detail).

composed in *rağaz* alternate with those of other metres, however, a permanent change between small text blocks and short columns results. This seems to be an exception, though, as this phenomenon only occurs in one manuscript. In four of the examined manuscripts, the poems in both *rağaz* and other metres are all written in two columns. This corresponds to the assertion which was put forward at the beginning, namely that poetry, no matter which kind, is most frequently written in two columns. In these manuscripts, the hemistichs are additionally always separated by dividers, usually dots or congeries of drops. Framing of the written area or the columns seems to be atypical for copies of the Abū Nuwās' *Dīwān* as this feature could not be found in any of the manuscripts examined.

Conclusion

Even the earliest dated copies in Arabic script – both Qurʾāns datable to the seventh or early eighth century and non-Qurʾānic texts in manuscripts from the ninth century – show a tendency to use long, continuous lines. This tradition was maintained by scribes when copying texts in Arabic script. Poetry, however, is an exception to this rule. The peculiarities of Arabic poetry determine the layout to a large extent. Copyists frequently used a layout that emphasised the typical characteristics of poetry, namely its bipartite structure and rhyme.[36] Although exceptions do exist, writing the hemistichs in two columns separated either by a gap, dividers or vertical lines seems to have been the most typical way of arranging poetry. Consequently, in most cases, even an untrained eye can recognise whether a text is poetry or prose simply by looking at its layout. In addition, in the case of monorhyme, the identical last grapheme(s) give the reader an important hint. The latter particularly matters in copies of Abū Nuwās' *Dīwān*, in which most of the poems (with the exception of the *ʾarāğīz*) are written in text blocks without any intermediate spacing.

Although standardised ways of writing down poetry have developed, some copies stand out because of their peculiar layout features, which – as this investigation has attempted to show – are not necessarily singular. Even the specifics of the fancy copy of the *Badʾ al-amālī* mentioned above (Sprenger 1956; cf. figs. 14–16), which one might take to be an exception at first glance, appear in other manuscripts containing for example copies of the *Ğawharat at-tauḥīd* (cf. fig. 31). These copies, which stand out on account of their complex design, are in the minority in relation to the rest of the group of copies of Arabic didactic poems. Apart from rare exceptions like these, they are usually designed in a relatively simple way with regard to the script, frames, dividers and colours used and the composition of the lines they contain. The reason for this is most likely to be their intended purpose, namely teaching and learning. These manuscripts preserve knowledge and also serve as an educational resource in a process in which oral and written traditions complement each other. Within this context, the copies of the didactic poems served as manuals for moral education and as implements for the memorisation of the text, which is why teachers were owners of manuscripts just as their pupils were, who frequently wrote the texts down in the course of their instruction and occasionally left important hints such as ownership statements, certificates of audition (*samāʿ*) or similar notes.

A simple but well-structured and functional form of visual organisation proved to be of value in this context of teaching and learning. In contrast, questions of prestige or comparable motives had little influence on the layout in most cases and were probably mostly restricted to commissioned works, which were not intended for intensive study. The primary purpose of these plain manuscripts made for practical use was the preservation and transmission of knowledge and this is ensured by a structured and organised – but not necessarily aesthetically appealing – copy of the poem. In conclusion, however, it has to be stressed that even if different layout features proved to be practical for this purpose and were used as a standard, every single copy is characterised by singularities and its own uniqueness.

[36] Cf. Déroche 2005, 171 and 173.

LIST OF MANUSCRIPTS

Al-Ūshī, *Bad' al-amālī*
Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz:
Diez oct. 50
Hs. or. 4496
Hs. or. 4505
Hs. or. 4950
Landberg 28
Sprenger 1956
Wetzstein 1718
Wetzstein 1721
Wetzstein 1754
Wetzstein 1804
Wetzstein 1748
Wetzstein 1793

Göttingen, Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek:
Cod. Ms. arab. 176

München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München:
Cod. arab. 1610
Cod. arab. 1735
Cod. arab. 2005
Cod. arab. 2615

Princeton, Princeton University Library:
Garrett no. 3174Y
Garrett no. 3563Y
Garrett no. 4392Y
Garrett no. 5014Y
Garrett no. 5043Y
Garrett no. 5130Y
Garrett no. 5310Y
Garrett no. 5729Y
Garrett no. 5807Y

Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library:
Aya Sofya 1446
Karaçelebizade 347
Kılıç Ali Paşa 1027

Ilorin, Nigeria:
Manuscript in a private collection owned by the Ile Tapa Gbodofu Qur'ān school in Ilorin, Nigeria (Reichmuth)

Ibn al-Wardī, *Qaṣīda al-lāmīya*
Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz:
Hs. or. 4438
Petermann 8
Petermann 241
Petermann 654
Petermann 696
Sprenger 1930
Sprenger 1966
Wetzstein 183
Wetzstein 409
Wetzstein 702
Wetzstein 705

Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München:
Cod. arab. 587
Cod. arab. 1235

Al-Laqānī, *Ǧawharat at-tauḥīd*
Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz:
Hs. or. 4831
Ms. or. Quart 618
Petermann 703
Sprenger 1953
Sprenger 1956
Wetzstein 1732

Ibn Zurayq, *Andalusīya*
Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin Preußischer Kulturbesitz:
Glaser 37
Glaser 168
Landberg 243
Ms. or. Quart 117
Ms. or. Quart 674
Petermann 193,1 and 2
Petermann 542
Sprenger 1228
Sprenger 1239
Wetzstein 1547

Abū Nuwās, *Dīwān*
Hamburg, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg Carl von Ossietsky:
Bequest from Arthur Schaade (NL Schaade), 28 Archive boxes with photographs of manuscripts:
Aḥmed Pašā 267
Add. 19404
Brit. Mus. Add. 24948
Fātiḥ 3773
Fātiḥ 3774
Fātiḥ 3775
Hs. Ambrosiana
Köprülü 1250
Köprülü 1251
Ms. No. 3867
Rāgib Paša 1099
ʿUmūmī 5767
Ẓāhirīya 7877

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